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SciVerse ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 84 (2013) 864 – 868

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

3rd World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance (WCPCG-2012)

A Study of the Siblings Relationships in Families with Mentally Disable Children

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Abstract

Overall, the available literature has produced contradictory findings on siblings relationships in families with handicapped Children. The aim of the present research was to study the sibling's relationships in families with mental retarded students. The sample of the study was the parents of 138 mental retarded students in Amol and Babol cities. Shaffer and Edgerton's (1981) behavioural indexes of siblings (SIB) scale was used in this study. Findings of the research showed quality of sibling's relationships decreases from primary school to secondary school and there was a significant difference between understanding of father and mother quality of sibling's relationships.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Huseyin Uzunboylu & Dr. Mukaddes Demirok, Near East University, Cyprus

Keywords: relationships, sister, brother, mental retarded, educable;

1. Introduction

The presence of illness and/or disability restricts many family's abilities to take part in everyday activities (Frank, Tatum & Tucker 1999). It is necessary to recognize that children affected by disability are a diverse group. Many factors influence their experiences and needs: e.g. the relationship between the child and the disabled family member, the nature of the disability, the child's age, gender and birth order, family and household composition and the family's social and material circumstances.

Scelles (1997) found children with disabled siblings can experience anxiety for a number of reasons. For example, they may react to parents' grief over the identification of impairment. Some feel guilty about not being "good" siblings or progressing "beyond" an older disabled sibling. Begun (1989) suggests that relationships between siblings may be less competitive than those between non disabled siblings but also less intimate. This contrasts with Lobato (1991) who found that siblings of young disabled children engaged in more parallel and social play and were more nurturing than others. While research may demonstrate more worry and stress of children with a disabled sibling, Summers (1994) write that this could be due to children's (poor) understanding of the disability itself. Foster

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and adoption studies have identified examples of children who felt having a disabled sibling brought understanding and sensitivity, affection and satisfaction (Ames 1996).

The presence of a mental retarded child can be a stress source for family (Jefferson, 2007) and affects deeply on Siblings Relationships. The situation of a mental retarded child requires the most money, attention and support of the family. McCubbin & Figley (1983) indicated that stressful factors (such as having a mental retarded child) change the family system such as relations between brothers and sisters.

Most researchers believe that Siblings Relationships in Families with Mentally Disable Children can be an important anticipator for relationships with peers (Lobato, Faust & Spirito, 1988).

Overall, the available literature has produced contradictory findings and conclusions on the potential effects of a disabled family member on a child. Much of this contradiction can be attributed to differences in the populations sampled, methods used and research questions, and to lack of comparison groups. Studies are affected by the contexts and assumptions of a particular time and place. Broader social, physical and economic influences have rarely been examined. Little is available on variations by geography (rural, urban etc.), family types, socio-economic status or ethnic background.

It is clear that establish and maintenance of a stable relation between families' members is an effective factor on reducing pressure, and always have been attended by professionals. Thus these families, especially brothers and sisters of a mental retardant child, need special intervention programs.

So the aim of the present research was to study the sibling's relationships in families with mental retarded students.

2. Methodology

The sample of the study was the parents of 138 educable students at primary and secondary schools in Amol and Babol cities (276 people) in the year 2007- 2008. None of the students who participated in the research have other disabilities, such as blindness, deafness, language deficiency and mobility handicap.

2.1. Tools

Shaffer and Edgerton's (1981) behavioural indexes of siblings: This scale designed by Shaffer and Edgerton and revised by Hetherington, Henderson, & Reiss (1999). Revised form of the scale used for this research. This 32 –item scale attempts to measure the negative and positive aspects of relationships between sisters and brothers. Positive aspects measured by three sub-scales include Companionship, Empathy, Teach/Manage, and negative ones measured by Rivalry, Aggression /Conflict, & Avoidance.

Developers of the scale reported the alpha coefficient (0/81) and, internal consistency coefficient of sub-scale in range of 0/90 – 0/34 and internal consistency coefficient of positive and negative aspects as 0/56 and 0/91, respectively (Hetherington & et al, 1999). In current research Test-retest reliability over a three-week period (0/90) and alpha coefficient (0/84) was also satisfactorily high.

3. Tables

Descriptive statistics showed that the number of educable mental retarded students was 138 that 65 were females (30 at elementary school and 35 middle school) and 73 were males (31 at elementary school and 42 middle school).

In order to study whether variables of sex and educational level of mental retarded child predict the sibling's relationships quality, multiple regression was used.

Table 1. Multiple regression analyze for predicting the relationship quality of sisters and brothers and its dimensions based on child sex and educational level

Relationship quality	Variable	R	R ²	P<	B	Beta	t	P
All Relations	Child sex	0/16	0/02	0/17	4/53	0/15	1/83	0/06
	Educational level				-0/99	-0/03	-0/40	0/69
Companionship	Child sex	0/23	0/05	0/021	1/11	0/12	1/51	0/13
	Educational level				-1/71	-0/19	-2/32	0/02
Empathy	Child sex	0/22	0/05	0/033	0/88	0/22	2/62	0/01
	Educational level				-0/09	-0/02	-0/27	0/78
Teach/Manage	Child sex	0/19	0/03	0/072	1/11	0/19	2/30	0/02
	Educational level				-0/09	-0/01	-0/19	0/84
Rivalry	Child sex	0/25	0/06	0/013	-0/77	-0/14	-1/69	0/09
	Educational level				-1/16	-0/21	-2/54	0/01
Aggression/Conflict	Child sex	0/16	0/02	0/17	-0/74	-0/14	-1/68	0/09
	Educational level				-0/40	-0/07	-0/90	0/36
Avoidance	Child sex	0/06	0/004	0/755	0/27	0/03	0/37	0/71
	Educational level				0/48	0/05	0/66	0/50

Multiple Regression analysis indicated that the variables of child sex and educational level can't predict relationship quality between brothers and sisters. Educational level is predictor for companionship ($B = -0/19$, $T = -2/32$, $P < 0/02$). Child sex is predictor for Empathy ($B = 0/22$, $T = 2/62$, $P < 0/01$) and Teach/Manage ($B = 0/19$, $T = 2/30$, $P < 0/02$), educational level is predictor for Rivalry ($B = -0/21$, $T = -2/54$, $P < 0/01$), and none of the variables (education level and child sex) can't predict Aggression/Conflict and Avoidance.

In order to study whether there is a significant difference between parents' understanding of the sibling's relationships, independent T-test was used.

Table 2. Independent T-test to compare mean scores parents' understanding of sibling's relationships

Relationship quality		N	X	SD	Df	T	P<
All Relations	Father	138	89/16	6/97	136	8/49	0/001
	Mother	138	85/96	8/15			
Companionship	Father	138	16/14	2/17	137	-7/52	0/001
	Mother	138	15/18	2/44			
Empathy	Father	138	14/18	1/22	136	-4/04	0/001
	Mother	138	14/49	0/96			
Teach/Manage	Father	138	10/97	1/45	136	-6/20	0/001
	Mother	138	10/34	1/64			
Rivalry	Father	138	8/20	1/36	137	5/54	0/001

Aggression/Conflict	Mother	138	8/67	1/53	137	5/64	0/001
	Father	138	5/97	1/32			
Avoidance	Mother	138	6/48	1/48	137	2/95	0/001
	Father	138	6/24	2/10			
	Mother	138	6/54	2/28			

The results show that there is a significant difference between understanding of father and mother quality of sibling's relationships ($T = 8/49$, $P < 0/001$), So that the mean score of fathers is higher than mothers. This method repeat in the subsets: Companionship ($T = -7/52$, $P < 0/001$), Teach/Manage ($T = -7/52$, $P < 0/001$). But The mean scores of mothers are higher than fathers in other the subsets: Empathy ($T = -4/04$, $P < 0/001$), Rivalry ($T = 5/54$, $P < 0/001$), Aggression/Conflict ($T = 5/64$, $P < 0/001$), Avoidance ($T = 2/95$, $P < 0/001$).

4. Discussion and conclusion

The focus on children affected by disability arose from the requirements of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and subsequent recognition of information gaps in Renfrewshire Council's planning for children's services. Children adversely affected by disabilities of another family members were included in the legislative category of "children in need" (Section 94 (4)), for whom local authorities have the duty to provide a range and level of services to "safeguard and promote" their welfare (Section 22). Further, local authorities have specific duties with regards to children adversely affected by disabilities, in terms of service provision and assessments (Section 23). So, the purpose of this research was to study the sibling's relationships in families with mental retarded students.

Findings of the research showed that none of educational level and sex of mental retardant child can predict relationship quality between brothers and sisters and dimension of Aggression/Conflict and Avoidance. Educational level predicts quality of companionship and Rivalry. Also sex variable predicts only Teach/Manage and Empathy dimensions; i.e. brothers and sisters had more interactive relations with their mental retarded sister.

These results are similar to Pit-Ten Cate & Loots (2000) findings. They believe that sex and age of mental retarded child effect on the cognitive performance of his brothers or sisters. Orsmond & Seltzer (2000) found that healthy brother has more limited relations with mental retarded sister. Also Rasmussen & Sobesity (1994) and Clark & Wilson (2003) emphasized on non-effective role of age and sex of mental retarded children on adaptive functions, respectively.

The possible reasons of such findings can be this matter that the source of such behaviors in brothers and sisters came from conflicting behaviors in parents due to lack of education and awareness about mental retarded child and interaction with children. Another factor which may affects on the siblings' relationship is parents' expectations. Also with respect to culture context which girls are supported more, this may be confirmed in case of mental retarded ones.

According to these results, there was a significant difference between understanding of father and mother quality of sibling's relationships as well as in different dimensions; i.e. understanding of fathers' score of sibling's relationships ($T = 8/49$, $P < 0/001$), and in Accompaniment ($T = -7/52$, $P < 0/001$) and Teach/Manage ($T = -6/20$, $P < 0/001$) was higher than mothers, while mothers' score was higher in empathy ($T = -4/04$, $P < 0/001$), Rivalry ($T = 5/54$, $P < 0/001$), Aggression/Conflict ($T = 5/64$, $P < 0/001$) and Avoidance ($T = 2/95$, $P < 0/004$). This Findings is similar to Banderix & Sivberg (2007) and Fox, Barrett & Shortt (2002) in negative aspects (competition, aggression and shirk) of mothers' understanding. They believe that sisters or brothers are not satisfied with relations with their mental retarded brother or sister and have more limited relationships.

The possible reasons of acquired findings about understanding of fathers of sibling's relationships may be the fathers' job (86% worker, farmer and etc) that make them to be out of home for a long time which lead to less information about their children relationship. In traditional families, especially with low level of education (71%

illiterate or elementary, in this research), mother are bringing children up and more observing conflicts between mental retarded child and other child (children) of the family.

Changes in sibling's relationships related to family structure and relationships. Researchers believe that providing special services for better living and life quality must include all family members of the mental retarded child.

It was also necessary to recognize that children affected by disability are in a diverse group. Many factors influence their experiences and needs. Generally it can be said that if needs are identified and meted on time, the siblings relationship will be formed correctly and positively. Identification of needs of the families with mental retarded children and to give services for removal their needs are caused that quality of sibling's relationships is formed correct and positive.

Finally, according to the limitations of this study, such as low sample size and not considering view of mental retarded children , it is proposed that firstly, the findings should be generalized with caution, secondly, broader research should be carried out considering this issue to increase the possibility of generalizing the results with greater confidence.

Acknowledgements

We appreciate all who helped us in this research.

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